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ABSTRACT

This module was developed as part of a federally funded study group project, to answer the question of how students with severe disabilities can actively participate in lessons within regular elementary classrooms alongside their nondisabled peers, while still meeting their individualized goals and objectives. The module presents a brief overview of the process of adapting curricula, recommended practices that teams can use to make adaptations on behalf of individual students, and examples of various curricular adaptations. Recommendations for a curriculum adaptation process are summarized, including team planning, identifying student needs, establishing student supports and services, and collaborating in the design of curricular adaptations. Strategies for modifying lessons for students with severe disabilities include: (1) individualized adaptations such as using a skill sequence different from the one followed by other students and providing personal assistance; (2) use of multi-level curricula; and (3) curriculum overlapping. (35 references) (JDD)

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Study Group Report Series, no. 3

Examples of Curricular Adaptations for Students With Severe Disabilities in the Elementary Classroom

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface 2

Purpose 4

Recommendations for a Process to Adapt Curricula 6

Individualized Curricular Adaptations and Examples 8

Conclusion 13

References and Resources 15

PREFACE

This report is a product of the Curricular Adaptations Study Group supported by the Leadership Inservice Project, a federally funded three year project directed by Luanna H. Meyer, Ph.D. The Leadership Inservice Project supports a total of eight such Study Groups working in different topical areas; four of these began during the 1989-1990 school year with two additional Study Groups added each subsequent year. Each Study Group is comprised of 4-8 individuals representing several school districts, and includes teachers, parents, and related services personnel who are interested in and have contributions to make regarding the topic that is the focus of the Group's activities. The Study Group model is designed to accomplish two purposes: (1) To produce "user-friendly" materials that are both developed by and designed for practitioners and parents to facilitate the implementation of educational innovations in programs for students with severe disabilities; and (2) To support the development of leadership and mentoring activities by teachers, related service providers, and parents themselves to assist their peers in the implementation and adaptations of such innovations. In all, individuals from nine different school districts working with students at all age levels in the Central New York region have participated in the project.

The Curricular Adaptations Study Group members are:

Cheryl Belle, Special Education Teacher, Baldwinsville Central School District
Kathy Green, Special Education Teacher, East Syracuse-Minoa School District
Joanne O'Connor, Special Education Teacher, Liverpool School District
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Initial activities of the Study Group centered upon the identification of a group goal and the process that the group would use to achieve that goal. To accomplish this, the agenda of our initial meetings involved discussion of school inclusion and what each individual was already doing within her own educational and community settings. Participants were able to identify various strategies that they had used to meet the challenges of gaining access to regular classes for their students and meeting those students' IEP goals within those classes.

In the identification of our Study Group goal, several options were considered. For example, topics of interest might be the development of instructional programs, data collection, functional academics, community-referenced instruction, scheduling, time management, or creating positive attitudes and understandings among administrators, teachers, and nondisabled students toward students with severe disabilities. We posed a question that captured the essence of our mutual interests and formed the basis for our activities:

How can students who have severe disabilities actively participate in lessons within regular elementary classrooms alongside their nondisabled peers, while still meeting their individualized goals and objectives?

In our efforts to address this question, we reviewed relevant books, journal articles, and book chapters (see resource list). In particular, a chapter by Giangreco and Putnam (1991) included an overview of curricular adaptations for inclusion that provided us with an organization framework for our work. As part of our information gathering activities, we also invited Michael Giangreco, Ph. D., from the University of Vermont's Center for Developmental Disabilities, to consult with us regarding current work on including students with severe disabilities as participants in regular classes both in New York (since he had worked in Central New York and received his doctorate from Syracuse University) and Vermont. Dr. Giangreco spent a day with us reviewing the rationale for inclusion, giving us an overview of curricular adaptations that promote participation, and outlining a problem-solving approach that he has used with teachers, students, and parents to plan programs designed to benefit all students (Giangreco & Cloninger, 1990; Giangreco, Cloninger, &.Iverson, 1990; Giangreco & Putnam, 1991; Giangreco & Meyer, 1988). As we developed this module in particular, we also reviewed the materials being developed and implemented by the New York Partnership for Statewide Systems Change and consulted with Project Coordinator James Black at Syracuse University.

As a result of our activities throughout the 1990-1991 school year, our Study Group on Curricular Adaptations drafted this module for teachers, parents, related service providers, and teacher educators who work with children and youth with severe disabilities in regular education environments. The module presents a brief overview of the process of adapting curricula, recommended practices that teams can use to make adaptations in their own settings on behalf of individual student, and provides examples of various curricular adaptations that we may have in order to educate students with severe disabilities in regular elementary school classrooms. The module is intended to be a resource for practitioners interested in additional information as well as to provide direct exemplars of making curricular adaptations for students within the mainstream.

PURPOSE

The benefits of inclusion for students with severe disabilities have been widely discussed in numerous publications, including gains in skill acquisition, the availability of positive role models, opportunities for social interactions with nondisabled peers and adults, and friendships with other children (Biklen, Corrigan, & Quick, 1988; Brown et al., 1991; Forest, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Strully & Strully, 1989; Vandercook, York, & Wolf, 1989; York, Vandercook, Heise-Neff, & Caughy, 1988). Meyer and Putnam (1988) reviewed the extensive evidence of the positive effects of social interactions with nondisabled peers upon students with severe disabilities, provided that some efforts are made to initiate and initially assist children in these interactions. Most recently, Cole and Meyer (1991) documented gains in various interpersonal skills and social competence by students as a function of school integration in comparison to the lack of gains in those same areas by students enrolled in separate school environments. To date, however, information on strategies to meet the individualized needs of students with severe disabilities within the regular classroom--and the outcomes of these efforts--has not been as widely available. Much of what exists is primarily a rationale for inclusion and descriptions of processes for team planning on behalf of individual students (e.g. Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1990). While these materials have been helpful, for practitioners and parents who are already persuaded about the value of inclusion and anxious to get started, there is a need for concrete examples of strategies that have actually been implemented in typical school settings.

Thus, our Study Group determined to produce a module that professionals and parents could use to guide their own school inclusion efforts at the elementary school level for students with severe disabilities. We focused upon Curricular Adaptations for the following reasons:

- The curriculum that exists in schools could be viewed as either a context for inclusion or (as has often been the case in the past) a barrier to inclusion. Explicit reference to the regular education curriculum in the design of instructional activities to meet student needs is necessary to insure that students with severe disabilities do not become "islands in the mainstream" whose educational programs are different and separate from their classmates' activities.

- When challenged and given the support to do so, regular educators have the knowledge and skills to adapt existing and required curricula in a variety of areas to meet the needs of a diverse range of students. These general competencies can be applied to expand the range of adaptations so that even students with the most severe disabilities can be accommodated within the regular classroom. By increasing knowledge about the variety of adaptations that are needed and have been made,

teams of regular and special education professionals can collaborate in the development of instruction that better meets the needs of ALL students.

- When challenged and given the support to do so, special educators, related service professionals, parents and regular education teachers have the knowledge and skills to plan IEP goals and objectives and instructional activities to meet those objectives within the context of natural school and community environments, including the regular classroom. By increasing their knowledge of the regular education curriculum, team members are in a far better position to design IEPs that truly promote the inclusion of students into their peer group, valued activities, and the community.

- Schools do indeed provide students with and without disabilities a variety of opportunities for meaningful social interactions throughout the school day. However, participation in structured learning activities--the curriculum--justifiably occupies the majority of time in school. Unless strategies are developed to include students with severe disabilities into these activities, they will continue to be viewed as part-time participants in their school and community (Schnorr, 1991).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A PROCESS TO ADAPT CURRICULA

The focus of this module is upon the "how to" of inclusion for students with severe disabilities. Although this manual does not include detailed guidelines for a planning process that an educational team would use to design an IEP and inclusive instructional opportunities within the regular classroom, a brief summary of recommendations is helpful. For each of the suggestions on our list below, we have provided a reference for those interested in details regarding that particular process.

Team Planning Student-centered planning for inclusive schooling should be a team effort involving the parents, regular and special education teachers, the educational assistant, related service providers, the building principal, and the student. In some instances, classmates and friends without disabilities may also provide the team with invaluable input (Thousand & Villa, 1989, 1990; Vandercook & York, 1990).

Identification of Student Needs Once the team is formed, the student's current and long-range priority educational needs must be identified, and the team decides how these needs will be addressed within the regular classroom with supplemental special education services and supports as required (Ford et al., 1989; Forest & Lusthaus, 1989; Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1990; Iverson, 1988; O'Brien, Forest, Snow, & Hasbury, 1989; York, Vandercook, Macdonald, & Wolff, 1989).

Establish Student Supports and Services Once specific IEP objectives have been assigned to the various instructional activities for mastery in the regular classroom, the team designates the needed supports and services to enable the student to benefit from those instructional opportunities (Fenwick, 1987; Ford, Davern, & Schnorr, 1992; Forest & Lusthaus, 1989; Giangreco & Putnam, 1991; Sapon-Shevin, 1990; Stainback & Stainback, 1990; York, Vandercook, Heise-Neff, & Caughey, 1988).

Collaborate in the Design of Curricular Adaptations Finally, the team is ready to design the various curricular adaptations needed for the student to master his or her IEP in the regular classroom. This will involve collaboration by both regular and special education professionals in the use of "accommodating" curricula within the regular classroom that seem ideally

suited to meet diverse needs, including cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, whole language approaches to math and reading, and multicultural education (Bredkamp, 1987; Ford & Davern, 1989; Giangreco & Putnam, 1991; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1986; Stainback, Stainback, & Slavin, 1989).

To guide this process of student-centered team planning, we have found it useful to ask questions such as:

- "How can students with severe disabilities have their individualized needs met while sharing instructional and leisure activities with their nondisabled peers?"

- "What teaching practices already exist within the regular classroom that would promote the inclusion of students with ongoing regular class lessons?"

- "What contributions can the special education professionals make to further enhance the ability of the regular classroom teacher to meet the needs of all students, including those who have a severe disability but also those who do not have a label?"

- "How can special education services be organized to support the student with severe disabilities in the regular classroom in a manner that does not interfere with that student's participation in activities?"

- "How can typical peers provide one another and the student with severe disabilities with natural supports that do not conflict with meeting their own educational goals or stigmatize the student with disabilities as someone who is different and always in need of help?"

These are complex questions, and a module could be written to address each of them. Our intention in listing them here is to provide a framework for evaluating curricular adaptations.

INDIVIDUALIZED CURRICULAR ADAPTATIONS AND EXAMPLES

In our search for instructional practices that promote the participation of students within regular class lessons, we found that there are indeed strategies for modifying lessons for students with severe disabilities. Although various terms have been used for different types of modifications, our Study Group agreed to utilize those discussed by Baumgart and her colleagues (Baumgart et al., 1982) updated by Giangreco and Putnam (1991). Thus, this final section of our module is organized around three types of Curricular Adaptations: (1) Individualized Adaptations; (2) Multi-Level Curricula; and (3) Curriculum Overlapping. For each of these general types of adaptations we will describe examples that have worked for us in our own schools and classrooms. Note that in many instances, meeting a student's individual needs will involve more than one type of Curricular Adaptation; the adaptations can and do often overlap with one another.

Individualized Adaptations

Students who need only Individualized Adaptations would have identical program goals and be working on the same level of instruction as their general education peers, but require some modification of response mode. For example, a student who is reading at grade level but who is visually impaired may require enlarged type, special equipment to read the classroom materials, and perhaps Braille for all written information. A student who is deaf will use an alternative communication system--such as American Sign Language--to participate in classroom activities with his or her peers, even though that student is also at grade level in the various subject areas; in this instance, the needed adaptations may include an interpreter whenever the student is in an environment where the teacher does not know Sign Language. Students with physical disabilities may also need wheelchairs, supports for sitting, electronic switches, computers, and other adapted equipment in order to access the regular curriculum materials and environment. For various reasons, some students may require more time to complete certain activities, requiring only a modification in pace. Another student may need a teacher-structured motivation system to complete work as the student is learning to become more self-directed over time. In each case, the educational goal for the individual student is identical to that of his or her classmates, but the student utilizes an alternate route to achieve that goal. Thus, Individualized Adaptations can include adapted materials, augmentative communication systems, special equipment, personal assistance, the use of a different skill sequence, or changing the rules of the activity (Baumgart et al., 1982). Examples of these adaptations are provided below:

Use of materials, devices, and/or equipment to promote participation

- During social studies, as students independently read books about different community helpers at their seats, a student who cannot read listens to a taped version of the book he chose earlier in the week. He has been taught to turn the page when signaled to do so on the tape recording, and to follow along by looking at the pictures.

- After completing a small group language arts project about relief maps, Max, who does not write, uses a name stamp to place his signature on the finished product along with his group members.

- As part of a science lesson on animals, students are to write 10 words that begin with the same letter as the animal they have chosen to study. Amy uses a picture dictionary to complete this assignment.

Providing personal assistance that includes verbal, gestural, physical, or supervisory assistance

- Two students are paired to write a journal entry: Delesta, who does not write, dictates her input for Sam--who does not have a disability but who needs practice writing--to write it into their journal.

- Two students deliver attendance sheets in their school by slipping them under the doors of each classroom. One student whose turn it is to take attendance assists his partner Jason--who has a physical disability and uses a wheelchair--by placing the attendance sheet on the floor so Jason can push it under the door with his foot.

- While using the learning center, three students play with pattern boards and colored rubber bands. They stretch the rubber bands across nails that have been hammered into a board in order to make a design of their choosing. One of the students, Carla, cannot stretch the rubber bands by herself but is learning to make choices of different colors and to ask a peer to place it on the board for her.

Use a skill sequence that is different from the one followed by the other students

- Maria, who does not speak and has difficulty making quick decisions from choices, is to decide what she wants for lunch before going to the cafeteria. In the classroom, she makes her lunch choices by pointing to pictures of food items she wants on the menu so a classmate can write out the order card she will hand to the cafeteria person.

- After each class, students go to their lockers to get the materials they need for their next class. One student, Andrew, walks much more slowly than his classmates, so he gathers the materials for three consecutive classes at once so he will be able to walk to classes with his peers.

- When making a poster about friendship during social studies, rather than designing and then drawing the poster free-hand, Jay chooses from an array of cut-out magazine pictures and glues them onto the poster board.

Change the rules that are followed by others to allow participation

- Shelby, who works more slowly than her classmates during math, is given fewer problems so she can complete her work at the same time as the other students and join them for free-time leisure activities. If she needs more practice, she could work on additional problems while her classmates are working independently on something that is not in her program.

- In art class, the students' trays are stored in alphabetical order in a vertical cabinet. The tray for Marisa, who has difficulty with her balance, is placed in the middle of the row even through her alphabetical placement would be at the top of the row.

- During daily calendar activities when students are randomly asked to place the date on the calendar, David is purposefully given several turns at the beginning of the month so he can practice recognition of the numbers 1-10 that are a focus of his math goals.

Multi-Level Curriculum

Multi-Level Curricula involve students working on the same goal area but at different levels. Thus, while classmates are working on mathematics, a student with severe disabilities might also be working on math but rather than learning subtraction, he might be learning one-to-one correspondence. Individualized Adaptations might also be needed in order for students to participate fully.

Different Level Only

- During a language arts lesson, Cory and Judy share the castle they made with their classmates. While Judy reads about the different parts of the castle, Cory names selected parts of the castle that involve words he is learning to use (such as window, door, and hallway).

- During history, when students are writing book reports on the Civil War, Danielle types the title and author on the computer and draws a picture to represent the story as her book report.

- For a math lesson on fractions, small groups of students are given a cardboard pizza cut into different pieces. Students are to hold up the pieces that match a fraction called out by the teacher (e.g., 1/4, 1/2). Ned works on his math objective of learning one-to-one correspondence as he passes each member of the group one piece of pizza.

Different Level with Individualized Adaptations

- During a small group math lesson, as the other students work on computing story problems, Rita works on writing the numbers 1-20 as she records the group's answers and then checks the group's work using her calculator (materials adaptation).

- During physical education class, while the students work on calisthenics, Laquith is assisted to perform range of motion exercises for his arms and legs (personal assistance adaptation).

- While students write in their journals about a recent community outing, one student Anita sequences photographs from the outing and tapes them into her journal (materials adaptation).

Curriculum Overlapping

In some instances, the student with severe disabilities may be learning a new skill in the context of an instructional activity with nondisabled peers in a completely different curricular area. The student's goal area is different, the level is different, and individualized adaptations might also be needed. By using the concept of Curriculum Overlapping, an instructional objective for a student with severe disabilities can be designed for practice and mastery in the context of a variety of classroom activities regardless of the goal area involved. Thus, nondisabled classmates may be learning biology, but the student with a severe disability may be learning social skills such as turn-taking or helping someone else, a communication skill such as following coded instructions that happen to be included in a computerized science lesson (with no expectation that s/he will master the biological concepts involved), or quantitative skills such as measuring length and height. The use of Curriculum Overlapping is limited only by the team's knowledge of the nature of the regular classroom activities and the willingness of the classroom teacher to utilize instructional methods that allow for active participation by students in a variety of ways.

Different Goal Area and Level

- During a science lesson on solid matter, students work in small groups to classify and describe different items. The students pass around a paper bag filled with various objects and then determine the size, shape, and texture of the object. In one group, Martin participates in the activity to meet his fine motor skill objective of grasping and holding objects. When it is his turn, a classmate presents the paper bag to Martin, who is to place his hand in the bag and remove one item that he holds while the other students determine its size, shape, and texture.

- During reading period, three students read a book together. Fran chooses the book from three options and turns the pages for the group using a pincer grasp while the other two students take turns reading the story aloud.

Different Goal Area and Level with Adaptations

- During social studies, students work in small groups to create a bulletin board on different cultures. Each group works on a different part of the board (e.g., the border, letters, pictures). In one group, the students will stencil and cut out the letters. A group member, Yolanda, with the assistance of an educational assistant, cuts out the letters by using scissors attached to a block of wood to keep them stable (materials and personal assistance adaptation). While cutting, Yolanda is assisted to straighten her arms, one at a time, to press down on the scissors. This provides an opportunity for her to practice her range of motion objectives.

- As part of a cooperative learning group activity on inventions, students are to create a new product to deal with current pollution problems. Each group of three students will contribute to a drawing of the group's invention: One student is to draw the base, another the middle, and another the top. Daniel will address his social-communicative objective of indicating preference by choosing from three possible choices of base designs prepared by the teacher (skill sequence adaptations). In addition, as the "encourager" for his group, Daniel will periodically choose one of the three notecards with positive statements written on them that he must pass to a group member who has contributed to the project (materials adaptation).

- While playing a teacher-made math board game, students work on adding the numbers on the two dice and solving the math problems

presented on the game board. Katie, who plays with a partner, addresses a social objective for turn-taking as she waits with her hands in her lap or on the table until it is her turn to roll the dice (her goal is modeled after how her nondisabled peers behave when awaiting their turn). Her partner adds the number on the dice and then points to where the playing piece should be placed (rules adaptation). Katie then addresses one of her motor objectives for using a pincer grasp by picking up the game piece and placing it where her partner is pointing (personal assistance adaptation). Her partner then solves the problem on the game board.

CONCLUSION

Curricular Adaptations are the technical strategies that support our beliefs that all students can and will learn what they need to master without being separated from their peer group, their neighborhood schools, and their community. This module is written primarily from the perspective of the special education teachers and the related service providers who are working with the regular education teachers to modify instructional activities to meet student needs. Our criterion environment for these activities is the regular classroom attended by same-age peers of the child who has severe disabilities. Making such adaptations on behalf of students requires more than knowing about the student with disabilities and his or her needs. Team members must also know about the instructional opportunities presented within the regular classroom and the various activities carried out in that classroom. In fact, use of a variety of instructional methods by the regular classroom teacher is as critical to the success of quality inclusive education programs as having positive attitudes about including students with disabilities. And working together to increase the range of learning opportunities for students in the regular classroom should have the added benefit of enhancing the education of all the students in that classroom.

School is a public place. By that we mean not only is school a place where students should receive a free and appropriate education that meets their needs, but school is also a place where students watch what adults do as well as what they say. Teaching is not a private act: Teachers create a personal identity for themselves through their teaching styles that will be passed on in unknown ways as they influence their students. As teachers are role models, students will indeed either indirectly or directly incorporate aspects of their teachers' values and ways of interacting with others as they academically progress and develop. Teachers who encourage inclusive classrooms, provide a range of opportunities that enable all students to learn according to their individualized needs, and create a psychologically safe place for children model a powerful lesson. Schools should not be places where children learn how to defeat one another and where the success of one child is dependent upon the failure of another. As the place where children spend

the majority of their childhood years as they develop the skills to become contributing members of their society, schools must model the importance of support and nurturance for one another's learning.

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